

# The MYSTERY of WILMOT GRAY

## From the Note Book of ALICE ROYCE, GIRL DETECTIVE

by Charles Somerville

No. 6 in the Series of  
Extraordinary Experiences of a Clever Young Girl.

"WELL, Miss Royce," came over the telephone in the hearty, jovial voice of T. W. Blaney, chief of the famous detective agency. "I've certainly got a funny one for you this time. I guess you might call it 'The Case of the Live Corpse.' If you please, Miss Royce, meet me at the office of President Blair of the Tower Insurance Company—you know, the building on Broadway, of course—at 2 o'clock this afternoon. I know it's a case that will interest you. Queer is no name for it. It's ghastly and ghostly."

Blaney was already there when the girl detective arrived, and he must have spoken flatteringly of the pretty young woman's record for skill and success in her profession, for President Blair, large and florid, arose pompously and made her a most elaborate bow.

"The case is such a strange one that it has been brought to my personal attention," said he, after settling down in his big revolving armchair. "Usually, of course, I leave all such affairs to our own investigating department. But this has proved too baffling a proposition for even our cleverest men. So I asked Mr. Blaney's aid, and he has told me that, in lieu of his own inability to take up the case personally at this time, he would offer your services as being the equal in every way to his own."

Miss Royce, having properly acknowledged the compliment with a short little nod and a vivid flush, Blair continued, consulting a memorandum: "Two years ago a man of the name of Wilmot Gray, living at No. 1860 Ralmon Avenue, in the Bronx, took out a \$25,000 policy with this company. He was unmarried and lived with his mother. Together they kept a little stationery and cigar store at the address I have given you, occupying living rooms in the rear. The investigators at the time made the observation in their reports that it appeared to be a rather large insurance for a man in such modest circumstances to take on. However, they also stated that as he was only thirty years old, a man of temperate habits and in excellent health, the risk was one to be approved and taken on by the Tower Company."

"Right here, perhaps, it would be well for me to give you a description in detail of Wilmot Gray. He was about 5 feet 6 inches in height; had light brown, rather curly hair, wore a pointed beard and mustache, was slim, but rather well built and weighed about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. He had a small scar on the forehead just over his right eye and another scar on his left foot, which he told his medical examiner at the time had come to him when a boy. He had been chopping wood and the axe head, slipping from the handle, had struck with its edge on his bare foot."

"Six months after taking out the \$25,000 policy, Miss Royce, Wilmot Gray died. It was a brief illness—a few days; pneumonia. Such was the cause of death given regularly in the death certificate by Dr. Donald H. Wagstaff, a licensed physician, and as far as we know a perfectly reputable one. His offices are in Ralmon Avenue, in the Bronx—a few doors away from where Wilmot Gray had his little shop. The regularity of the death certificate convinced us of the fact that Wilmot Gray was really dead, and there was further recorded the burial of his body in Greenwood Cemetery. So the claim was paid at the time without question."

President Blair paused and leaned toward the girl detective, his eyes lighting dramatically.

"Now comes the startling information to us," he said, "that Wilmot Gray is alive, in as excellent health



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as the day we insured him! And yet in the face of other very convincing facts I strongly doubt if the young man can be anywhere except in his grave."

"But listen, if you please, to the written statement of Dr. James Slear, who was formerly a medical examiner with this company, but is now in the employ of the Alps Insurance Corporation. Dr. Slear says:

"On the 15th of this December I was detailed to make an examination of an Arthur J. Preston at No. 324 West 18th street. Although, of course, in the nature of my practice I make countless examinations, I was struck with the idea that I had seen Preston before and that for some cause I had good reason to remember him. Something had happened, I was sure, to especially impress me with this man. But when I asked him if we had ever met before, he said he was certain that we had not. When requested to strip, he did so without hesitation. Then it was that memory startled me, for I saw the selfsame scar on his left foot that I now clearly remember as having seen on the left foot of Wilmot Gray. Gray I naturally especially remembered, as an insurance doctor is likely to remember a \$25,000 risk which he passes who dies six months afterward. In the course of my further examination I had naturally a chance to subject the man to close scrutiny. I am sure that Wilmot Gray and Arthur J. Preston are one and the same. Their height, features, even to the pointed brown beard; weight, and all other physical characteristics are the same. I remembered that Gray had a small scar over his right eye. So also has Preston. When I asked him his age he said he was thirty-two. Gray gave his age as thirty when I examined him, which was just two years ago."

"In conclusion, I am so firmly and completely of the belief that Preston and Gray are the same man that I would suggest that the Tower Company make a rigorous investigation, even to the extent of applying to the courts for the exhumation of the body buried in Greenwood Cemetery, presumably as that of Wilmot Gray."

"You will observe, Miss Royce, that Dr. Slear writes very positively, and a further coincidence is the fact that Preston is seeking insurance with the Alps Company in exactly the same sum that Gray obtained from us—\$25,000."

"But"—President Blair dubiously nodded his head—"on the other hand, not a fact that could be ascertained by a dozen of our most expert investigators will show anything other than that Wilmot Gray is really in his grave. To be sure, his mother has absolutely disappeared. After the receipt of the insurance money she told her neighbors that she meant to return to her old home—a village in Connecticut—purchase a farm and retire there for the rest of her days. But to none of them did she name the village where she intended to go. Search for her has been fruitless."

"Nevertheless, our agents have rounded up fully a score of perfectly respectable and trustworthy persons who saw Gray in his coffin—who attended his funeral and took a farewell look at his countenance before the coffin was sealed. And there is the

clergyman who officiated at the funeral services and declares it was surely a dead man who lay in the casket over which he preached, and, finally, there is Dr. Donald H. Wagstaff—whose assertion cannot be controverted—that he attended Gray in an illness of pneumonia and that the young man actually passed away in his presence. Under such circumstances the Tower Company naturally hesitates to go before any court and ask permission to exhumate the body of Wilmot Gray."

In token of helplessness, the official waved his hands. "Yet when these facts," he said, "were put before Dr. Slear he nevertheless insisted that he could not be mistaken—that Preston was surely none other than Gray; that the Tower Company had in some superclever fashion been cheated out of no less than \$25,000. And there's where the case stands, Miss Royce. Will you undertake the exposure of Preston as a swindler or, failing that, guarantee forever to lay the ghost of Gray?"

II. When Alice Royce accepted the commission to investigate the curious and suggestively uncanny case it was after an agreement made with President Blair of the Tower Company that he would confer with the president of the Alps Insurance Corporation and arrange that Preston's application for the \$25,000 insurance policy be accepted.

"For," said the girl detective, "if all the other facts stand as you have stated them—the testimony of persons present at the funeral, of the officiating clergyman and the attending physician, Wilmot Gray must have played an amazing trick in successfully posing as a victim of pneumonia and then as a corpse, to say nothing of his escape from his coffin afterward. If Preston is Gray—he'll try the same amazing trick over again. I will watch sharply to see if in the next few months he 'dies.' If he goes right on paying his premiums for years, it would be good proof that Dr. Slear was mistaken—misled by the similarity of the two scars—the one

on the foot, the other over his eye. By the way, did Dr. Slear ask Preston how he came to get that scar on his foot?"

"Yes—to be sure. Preston declared the injury came about in a fall he had from a motorcycle. He said also, by way of not damaging his case as a 'risk,' that he had since completely given up that form of sport."

The first suggestion beyond that of lying in wait for Preston's possible "death" that came to the pretty girl was to seek out some of the old neighbors of Wilmot Gray and take them to where they might have a sight of Arthur Preston. But this, she concluded, presented a danger needless to incur. Preston might observe these watchers and, were he really Gray, be warned that he was suspected and under espionage, at which, if he were a guilty man, he might easily decamp, for there existed no evidence whatsoever with which the police authorities could be armed to prevent his disappearance. The thought that also she might, having identified Preston, walk up quietly behind him and speak to him in the name of Gray, watch the effect of such a salutation and gain information thereby, she also dismissed. Best was the scheme to keep Preston in sight and await developments.

Meanwhile, however, there was no reason why she should not see the man on some pretext and secure the opportunity to draw her own conclusions regarding his character. There was an unexpected development when she arrived at Preston's address in 18th street. Here was something that neither Dr. Slear nor the investigators had reported, or else President Blair had intentionally left it out. Preston owned and conducted there a stationery and cigar store, as Gray had done in the Bronx! Could it be that also, like Gray, he was unmarried and the only support of a mother? No; in this respect there was a difference. From the woman proprietor of a notions store in the neighborhood she learned that Preston was a married man. He had, however, no children.

"I thought perhaps," said Alice Royce to the shopkeeper, "when I heard that a Mr. Preston had a store in this neighborhood, it might be an old friend of mine. But it can't be. He had several children."

In this wise she displayed caution lest the woman be a friend of Preston and happen to tell him that inquiry was being made concerning him.

Sauntering into Preston's shop, she slowly looked over current magazines, under the eyes of the brown-bearded, rather good looking man who came out from the rear living rooms, and she was rather interested to note that this humble shopkeeper wore a flashing genuine diamond in his scarf and another in a ring on his finger. Beyond the fact that he was affable and could intelligently discuss his literary wares her talk with him brought her no profit of elucidation of his character. There was no positive expression of roguery in his countenance; in fact, he seemed only to be that for which he set up—a small shopkeeper; all save the glittering, costly jewelry that he wore.

But in the months that followed, Alice Royce by careful and nearly constant watching began to secure considerable enlightenment, in the course of which another important character came under her observation, so that in the end she was not in the least surprised when one morning, about five months after she had been called into the case, she read among the death notices in all the leading newspapers the following:

"PRESTON, Arthur J., beloved husband of Ella Preston, in the thirty-second year of his age. Funeral services at his residence, No. 324 West 18th street at 2 o'clock Friday afternoon. Burial at Greenwood."

When she read this solemn announcement, its effect on Alice Royce was to make her smile, but when on Friday afternoon at 2 o'clock she presented herself at the funeral services she wore a becomingly serious expression; in fact, during the prayers and the brief funeral sermon, she was of those in the crowded little parlor who wept most conspicuously. The widow was not present beside the bier, it being announced that she was too utterly prostrated by her grief. When finally the line formed to pass the casket for a farewell glimpse of the deceased, Alice Royce paused perhaps longer than any of the others—so markedly, indeed, that the undertaker guiding the throng rather brusquely touched her on the arm to indicate that she was holding up the line.

Alice Royce observed that the lid at the head of the coffin was only partly lowered in its grooves, so that merely the face and throat of Preston were visible. His countenance looked very placid, and there was a flower in the lapel of his black coat. And when Alice Royce leaned far over the bier as though in devotion and did a rather horrible thing—jabbed a pin in the cheek of the placid face—it never changed expression. There was no twitch, no grimace of the features or start of the head. Immediately thereafter, concealed in her handkerchief, she passed over the lips and nostrils of Preston's face a little mirror. She was sure this action had not been observed or understood by the undertaker standing near, but it was then that he touched her on the arm as a signal to pass on.

As she did so she lifted her handkerchief as if to stay her tears. In reality, she stared hard at the surface of the little mirror. She waited outside the house in a group of morbidly curious women and children and watched the casket borne to a big automobile hearse. A single carriage followed, into which only two persons entered. One was, of course, the widow, her countenance completely concealed by her veil. With knowing eyes Alice Royce regarded the portly, elderly man in high hat and frock coat who escorted the woman. And when the little funeral procession moved rapidly off Alice Royce nearly as rapidly made her way to a taxicab awaiting her at the corner. In this she followed the hearse.

It was as she expected. The process-

sion did not move out directly toward the Brooklyn cemetery. It moved due east, then slanted north and finally stopped before the undertaking establishment of the Reshwar Brothers in the Bronx.

At 4 o'clock that same afternoon Alice Royce called up President Blair in his offices at the Tower Insurance Company. "Wilmot Gray, Dr. Wagstaff, the woman in the case and the Reshwar Brothers were all arrested ten minutes ago and Exhibit A in the case of fraud will be a casket loaded with bricks," she announced.

III. Blaney, the celebrated detective, and Blair awaited the arrival of Alice Royce impatiently, eager to hear her explanation of the strange case of Wilmot Gray.

"It was really very simple," said the girl detective, "the minute I began to know something of Dr. Wagstaff. It seems that for years he has devoted himself to a study of hypnotism and became really an adept. Gray, who was in the beginning genuinely a shopkeeper, became one of Dr. Wagstaff's best subjects. He could throw Gray into a perfect state of catalepsy. Many of the neighbors had witnessed these exhibitions in the past, when Gray would, under the suggestion of the old doctor, remain for hours perfectly rigid, breathing so slightly that some of the more ignorant observers would fear the man was dead or dying and beg Dr. Wagstaff to restore him to normal consciousness."

"Then, when Preston died within a few months of taking out a \$25,000 insurance policy and I found that, like Gray, he had died of pneumonia, and, as with Gray, Dr. Wagstaff had been his attending physician and made out the death certificate, I was altogether sure of my ground when I attended the funeral."

## HUNTING TREASURE.

"SEEKING for treasure." The words are as a magnet in the power they have over the minds of men. Let an explorer come home to tell of gold mines, of gems, and of pearls to be found in some region of utter desolation, amid peril, discomfort and solitude, and the great and small, gentle and simple rush in thousands overseas in pursuit of the golden spoil. Perhaps nowhere has the romance of seeking treasure been kept so actively alive as in the northern gold-producing regions of North America.

Even stranger than fiction is the tale told by Charles McLeod, an Edmonton prospector, who, while leading a party of gold-seekers through the wastes of the northwest section of British Columbia, stumbled over the bones of his two brothers and hit upon a location of auriferous quartz now bringing him in a colossal fortune.

One night in 1908, while "making camp" with his fellow-prospectors, McLeod discovered the traces of an old camp fire in the forest nearby, and in idle curiosity began to scrape among the ashes and bits of charred wood, presently to find on the trunk of a pine near at hand an inscription consisting of the date, "May, 1905," and the initials of his two brothers, who had been missing for several years. Later on, the discovery was made of two skeletons under a tree a little distance off the trail, and not far from the tree McLeod picked up a watch, which he at once recognized as having belonged to his brother Frank.

On the trees in the vicinity being closely examined a "blazed" trunk was found with much carving, but very few of the words were readable. Near the foot of the tree McLeod managed to make out sufficient to lead him to believe that a complete deciphering would probably mean his fortune.

The words that had remained decipherable referred to the locating of a gold "shaft," but the murderers, who were presumed to have been Indians, had not only taken the precautions to remove from their victims all means of identification, but had also cut the tree in such a manner as to make the carving unintelligible. Near at hand, however, McLeod chanced on a shaft, which had apparently been sunk in recent years and from which a considerable quantity of gold had been extracted. Subsequently some Indians claimed that they had sunk this shaft, but the matter was determined in McLeod's favor.

At the present day the prospectors' camps in Southwest Oregon are haunted by a little old man, who seldom comes in, and who when approached threatens with his rifle and then slinks off into the tall timber and scrub at hand. The camp to which he attaches himself he watches most carefully, following one man after another as they leave to look for game.

Something like thirty years ago this ghost-like man was a stout, strong, young German, who came into Oregon to seek gold. He did find a very valuable "prospect," and had begun to work it when the Indians surprised

"Preston," laughed the girl, "certainly looked 'dead.' His breathing was indeed imperceptible. I first jabbed a pin in his cheek, satisfying myself that I was right in believing that the striking semblance to death was caused by his having been thrown into a state of perfect catalepsy, and then my mirror test gave me positive evidence by the moisture on it after I had passed it over the 'dead man's' lips that Preston was alive and breathing. I watched the coffin carried out and saw that the head lid was only half-screwed down. This convinced me that Preston was being taken elsewhere to be released. Of course, it would be dangerous for him to have remained in the house; the possibility of somebody seeing him alive after his own funeral was too grave a menace."

"The coffin hadn't been carried into the Reshwar undertaking establishment half an hour before Preston or Gray walked out with Dr. Wagstaff and the woman, who is really, I understand, his wife, and were arrested by the Central Office men who, like myself, had, on my information, followed the funeral procession. Preston had doffed his 'grave clothes' for less solemn raiment, and he had also shaved off his beard and mustache by way of precaution. But he was, nevertheless, easily recognizable."

"Indeed, five minutes after his arrest he was in the midst of a full confession. He declared that the scheme had originated with the elderly doctor, and that most of the proceeds of the first 'haul' he had turned over to his mother. Wagstaff had convinced the undertakers that the scheme was one not possible of detection, and all the conspirators had entertained a not altogether improbable vision of securing vast fortunes through Wagstaff's hypnotism and Gray's deaths."

His one companion was killed, but the young man escaped and made his way to Rogue River, still hugging some pieces of auriferous quartz."

It was years before he came back with money enough to reopen his mine, the knowledge of which had made him rich during all the weary time of hard work and self-denial when he was laying up the "grub-stake" which was to keep him from the necessity of sharing his wealth with a partner.

But he could not find his mine! The frost and the snow, a landslip or two, and the overflowing of the cascading stream had obliterated his landmarks. At last, his money being exhausted, he told others of his mine and showed them the specimens which he had kept by him all the years. The miners of Southwest Oregon are tired now of looking for the lost mine, but the German still moves about the hills in a state of fear lest any one should find before he does the "Crazy Dutchman Mine."

In the early days of the Yukon gold-seekers much search was made for an alluvial source from which the Indians, early in the nineteenth century, must have obtained the gold dust which for a time they disposed of to trappers, the Hudson Bay Company and others. One morning a prospector, Joe Carver, when camping with an Indian hunter, was told by him that seeing the rising sun gleam on the rocks, at the base of which ran a stream, brought to his memory that the place had been called by his forefathers the "Rocks of Gold." Search revealed the great hoard which Nature had been accumulating in the bed of the stream there for innumerable centuries.

About eight years ago Isaac Newton Fowler, a Brooklyn man, while hunting in Chihuahua, Mex., found an old tunnel, the mouth of which had been walled up at some remote time. There was the usual local tradition of a lost mine in the neighborhood, worked by the Spaniards of old and abandoned by them in consequence of the hostility of the Apaches. The discoverers of the walled-up tunnel decided this was it, and have found it to be an exceedingly paying one.

A still richer find was that of a prospector on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, near Fort Hancock, Tex. An old "dump" of worked rock had been there so long that nobody knew who had taken the rock out. Not even a tradition was associated with it. A prospector interested capitalists, and the old workings were reopened.

On the face of the hill being cleared for the tunnel, the miners were surprised to find a solid wall of masonry, laid in cement, and so hard that they had to blow it down by means of dynamite. Once through this wall they discovered a tunnel that a few feet further on was closed by a massive door of hardwood logs fastened by a huge lock of antique Spanish workmanship. They broke in and found that the tunnel ran about four hundred feet to a breast of ore many times richer than any found for many years. A revolution or Indian rising had probably caused the mine to be abandoned, and the workers with the characteristic subtlety of their time had hidden the bonanza, leaving exposed only the waste product on the surface.



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